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A textbook for Icon Painters as a way to counter the dominance of „bad patterns”. The activities of the Committee for the Care of Russian Icon Painting founded in 1901.

In the nineteenth century among Russian intellectual elites there was a growing conviction that the icon painting is in a state of collapse. The reason of that state of affairs was thought to be the departure from tradition and true devoutness as a result of the popularity of iconographic patterns related to the Catholic Church.

The penetration of Western models into the Russian icon painting dates back to the sixteenth century, when in Russian lands for the first time appeared graphics of Western provenance.

In the seventeenth century German and French iconographic patterns reached the Muscovite State and enjoyed great popularity at the court of tsar Alexei Mikhaylovich (1645 – 1676) as well as in a group of icon painters gathering around the tsar and residing in the Kremlin Armory Chamber. During the reign of Alexei Mikhaylovich's son, Peter the Great (1689 – 1725) the tendency to borrow iconographic patterns from the West intensified.

Borrowing Catholic and Protestant patterns resulted in the appearance of many iconographic patterns in Russian icon painting that were not characteristic of the Orthodox tradition, e.g. passion scenes, depictions of God – the Father and the Catholic Resurrection of Christ.

The edition of a so – called podlinnik was expected to become a remedy for the dissemination of alien, unorthodox iconographic patterns. Podlinniks being textbooks for icon painters with redrawn icon compositions together with guidelines for artists were known since the sixteenth century, but in the eighteenth century they disappeared giving place to graphics and luboks. In the nineteenth century several attempts to create podlinniks were undertaken. The most successful among them was that edited by Solncev.

The need to create an own podlinnik was already stressed at the first meeting of the Committee for the Care of Russian Icon Painting founded in 1901 during the reign of tsar Nikolas II (1894 – 1917). The podlinnik was expected to fulfill an ambitious task: to create a reference style of Orthodox iconography based on old patterns combining harmoniously „old” and „new”. – The podlinnik was intended mainly to be used by icon painters, to

provide them with knowledge of iconography and also to be a source of ready – made, consistent with the tradition „good patterns” for direct copying.

The responsibility for the elaboration of a textbook for icon painters took the outstanding Russian byzantinist Nikodim Kondakov. In order to prepare and collect material he visited the most important Russian iconographic centers: Palekh, Mstera and Kholuy. After overcoming the difficulties connected with getting access to the collections of icons in churches and after having employed a group of icon painters engaged in making redraws Kondakov set to work.

The first part of the podlinnik covering the iconography of Christ was published in 1905. Beside a popularized scientific introduction written by Kondakov the podlinnik contained 116 illustrations, including photographs and graphics. – Because of the Russian – Japanese war and the outbreak of the revolution in 1905 the work was not continued. The theoretical part of the iconography of Mary without illustrations only was printed.

The initiative of the Committee for the Care of Russian Icon Painting was an undertaking on a large scale, but it could not be realized due to historical events. – In retrospect, we can say that even the first volume of the podlinnik did not fully accomplish the original assumptions. – The price of the podlinnik, which was edited in a luxury form with a small circulation, was as high as 25 rubles. This amount was at that time unacceptable for an icon painter.

Furthermore the scientific part most likely was not clear for an ordinary, provincial painter who could hardly read. However, it should be emphasized, that Kondakov's podlinnik edited more than 100 years ago till now remains the only attempt to summarize the Orthodox Christological and Marian iconography.